612 belonging to the clan of the father or the mother (or belonging to a clan connected by marriage to either when the common origin is still known). We have already pointed out certain circumstances in which maternal kinship is effective. It should be remembered that this maternal kinship manifests itself from childhood on by obligating the mwanō kal to visit his nya-nduma(s), that it is able to receive the right of guardianship, to collect the bride price, and to benefit from an inheritance (in addition to compensation normally provided at the time of a maternal nephew's death) by substituting for a vanished paternal kinship, and that it shares along with the relatives by marriage (abè) in the various phases of funeral ceremonies and mourning. This fact suggests that the power of the maternal kinship, while remaining subordinate, is recognized in this way to strengthen the power of "alliances" created by marriage. Those related to the father by marriage are the nya-nduma of his immediate descendants. In this way the bonds essential to the existence of traditional Fang society are consolidated.

Marriage and Alliances

581 554 The first explorers, Du Chaillu and M. H. Kingsley, did not fail to point out the important role of relations set up by means of the numerous marriages among foreign groupings. Father Trilles, in his study made at the beginning of this century, also pointed out the personal advantages connected with a network [119] of alliances opened up through the interplay of marriages. He writes: "The Fang will therefore marry a girl in order to secure alliances in other tribes, to acquire greater influence by having more men attached to him by the ties of blood." (1) All researchers emphasize definitely

1. Father Trilles, "Proverbes, légendes et contes Fang [Fang Sayings, Legends and Tales]," Bulletin de la Société Neuchâteloise de Géographie, 1905, pp. 49-295.

two social consequences of marriage: the increase of personal prestige and the increase of the strength of the family group.

581 554 These facts should be complemented by specifying the particular 562 value attributed by every Fang to the "possession" of several wives

581 and by recalling the keen competition for women this society. This
554 value was expressed in a colorful way by Dr. Cureau when he said:
562 "The gynaeceum is a bank, a savings bank...." (2) And M. L. Mba,

2. Dr. A. Cureau, op. cit., p. 118.

a Fang of the Libreville region, in his Coutumier Pahouin [Pahuin Customs] gives a similar interpretation: the wife "is part of the property (or bioum) of the group into which she enters by marriage." [837] He completes this interpretation by saying that the adultery of a married woman "is severely punished because it is considered a theft." (3) The woman has no juridical personality: she has no

3. In the same vein, we cite a remark, quoted by Mgr. Martrou in a study dated 1918, made by a young Fang of Libreville to his wife: "What do you have to complain of, you are my beast ... I paid a high enough price for you!"

personal property of any importance, merely goods for everyday use; she has no share in any inheritance; she is transmitted by inheritance, just as are various goods and valuables (which may be considered virtually as women). However, the woman is property of a special kind; she is property in the highest sense of the word: creative capital. [She is the] source of produce (by her agricultural function, all the more important now that the woman takes part in cultivating the rich plantations) and of service (by her various domestic functions). [She is the] source of power, by "the procreation of children contributing to the defense of the group or securing alliances," (4) and [she is the source] of personal prestige.

4. L. Mba, op. cit., p. 29.

[She is the] source of "alliances" and kinship; through her the number of people who exchange services and gifts and who can render aid and assistance is increased. Thus, marriage has a

581 554 562 specific social meaning; it creates bonds (abè) which fasten together the family and clan groupings. Curault points out that this imposes a "close union, in spite of divergencies in language and in spite of the palavers of the different parts of the Pahouin people." At the same time, marriage [120] has a personal meaning. In traditional [556] Fang society the possession of many wives is the principal sign of wealth and the condition for all increase of wealth. This wealth conditions the importance of the social role; it makes possible the acquisition of a kind of personal power in a society with hardly any hierarchical system. (1)

1. Let us point out that two words with the same root, éval and évala, mean "polygamy" and "a prop, a support," respectively.

836 Because of this personal element the competition for women can become particularly keen. Very early, government reports pointed out the frequency of palavers due to the "women question," and they continue to complain of them as being characteristic of "Fang society and psychology." Let us state at the outset that the competition does not concern the sexual services demanded from the woman. For the unmarried men there are various compensating possibilities -- but only in the line of "lustful sexuality," to quote the expression of R. Bastide. (2) The young unmarried people have

2. R. Bastide, Sociologie et Psychanalyse [Sociology and Psychoanalysis], Bibliothèque de Sociologie Contemporaine, Paris, 1950.

complete sexual liberty among themselves: it is the custom called azòya-angòn (azòya, fornication; ngòn, maiden). E. Trezenem states in his monograph on the Fang of the Ogooué that "virginity of the woman is considered of no importance," that "the young 836 girls are free to give themselves to whomever they want." Then 594 he adds an "important restriction," saying that there are practically

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"Etudes sur le Pays Pahouin [Study on the Pahouin Country]," op. cit.

"friendship wife"), show, as does the freedom just referred to, that the curbing of adultery can be explained by social reasons which are quite alien to sexuality.

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The possibility of raping women of neighboring people during the time of conquest, the possibility of buying foreign women at a good price, so long as the slave trade lasted, permitted the "chiefs" of groupings to remedy the dangers due to the unsatisfied desires of the young men. Apparently the Fang do not display, as do some people, (2) signs of unsatisfied sex due to the fact that

2. Cf. R. Bastide, Sociologie et Psychanalyse [Sociology and Psychoanalysis], pp. 160-161.

women remain the property of the older men. What is sought is the legal possession of the woman, let us say, for the many advantages it entails, rather than sexual possession. And in this sense the justification brought forward by L. Mba can be understood when he writes, "It was not material satisfaction of the senses which drove the Pahouins to polygamy, but many other reasons. . . ."

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When the marriage is consummated, the woman goes from a state of near liberty to one of strict sexual control. The specific painful physical penalties for adultery to which the woman alone is subject are particularly severe: being exposed naked before the assembled village, being tied to the ant tree, excision of the clitoris or pimento torture, various mutilations. When the woman, either by flight or by rape, leaves the grouping into which she married, the whole group reacts violently. It is the cause of fights, kidnaping, and pillaging of the village that has taken her in. (3) There is the most absolute contrast between this control

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3. "Hence, conflicts that last for years, expressed through kidnaping of women and ending in gunshots," Libreville, Archives of 1909. And

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> the saying: "If the woman is the receptacle in which all can quench their thirst, she should not be carried off."

between these collective sanctions, and the very broad morality which allows a girl to "celebrate her youth" and which appears in the proverb: "Woman is an ear of dry corn in which anyone with teeth may bite." Marriage strengthens the socialization of woman, imposing on her [122] unconditional submission. One might say, to quote R. Bastide, that it consists in passing from "lustful sexuality" to "social sexuality."

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585 The social character of marriage is emphasized symbolically. A series of ceremonies mark the admission of the woman into the group that is receiving her. The mother of her husband recites the latter's genealogy, and a segregation of a week is imposed on her, after which she undergoes a coming-out ritual — she is bathed and anointed with oil by the oldest woman relative — [55] and she receives a new name, indicating a wish, which the other women give to her at a time of song and dance. (1) The "alliance"

1. Cf. E. Trezenem, op. cit., p. 89.

concluded between the two family groupings is demonstrated by meals taken together and by rejoicing (éyalö), and above all, it is [769] consecrated by the sacrifice of an animal destined for the biéri (ancestors' altar) of the young girl's parents, showing that bonds exist not only with the group of living but also with the community of ancestors. (2) The emphasis is thus laid on taking possession of

> 2. No doubt it is necessary to link this sacred character of the alliance to the violence of collective reactions provoked by "women affairs."

the posterity (in this respect the recitation of the genealogy appears to be very significant) and on the creation of an alliance (the same

581 word abè meaning both the bond and those joined) imposing peace
585 and mutual assistance. In this way the two essential functions of the woman are revealed: she is an element of fecundity and a maker of peace and assistance. These are the elements on which traditional Fang society is based. Hence it is easy to understand the control exercised by the group by restricting freedom of choice of a spouse — through the medium of the head of the family, it seeks the alliance which will be of greatest advantage to it (3) — and by

> 3. Cf. L. Mba, op. cit., "In the past the opinion of the interested parties mattered little. The request is made by the head of one family to the head of another family."

intervening when the flight or rape of the woman would compromise the equilibrium brought about by the marriage.

583 The method itself of marriage marks the development of a
584 series of exchanges between the two family groups it unites. With the first phase known as the "betrothal," dzâġa, the young man acquires pre-eminence over the chosen girl. He has the right to live with her for several days, but his family must provide the "fiancée's"parents with the first presents and must lend assistance at the time of various undertakings (clearing undergrowth, building huts, hunting [123] or fishing expeditions). During this period the girl's father determines the amount of the bride price, "nswa. The second period corresponds to the payment of this bride price, which may be made at intervals, provided that the first payment be the largest. This often gives rise to arguments and palavers. On the other hand, the ṅkia ("he who has received the bride price") is obliged to bring compensation in the form of gifts, usually of animals, which are called mévalö. Finally, the third phase corresponds to the "handing over of the fiancée" and to her settlement in the midst of the family grouping of the young man. It involves the ceremony we have described. The woman, according to Largeau, becomes truly the wife (mônöga), and not merely the concubine, from the moment when she is able to cook for her husband after

583 of the alliance. (5)
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5. Cf., on the importance of these facts of reciprocity and their role in so-called primitive societies, the remarkable work of C. Levi-Strauss devoted to the study of Structures élémentaires de la Parenté [Elementary Structures of Kinship], Paris, 1949.

581 As it circulates, the bride price weaves a network of ties
583 between groupings which, without the obligation of exogamy, would
578 have lived as so many biological, economic, and political units
595 retired within themselves. [124] It compels co-operation; it creates zones of security in a country where, at a time of conquest, the economic competition is severe (as regards the best land for cultivation and hunting, and the trade centers and roads). In addition the double exogamy multiplies these abé bonds, and the specific recognition of the maternal kinship reinforces, as we have suggested, these bonds, The circulation of women and in a parallel direction that of the bride prices have to be minutely regulated. This function belongs to the head of the nd'è bòt, to the ntòl, the latter signifying not only "ancient" but also "arbiter, envoy, ambassador." He is custodian of wealth and giver of women. At the level of the segment of brothers (bobèñâg), the principle that bride prices received at the time of the marriage of daughters are used to marry the sons in the order of their birth is completed by the obligation of the eldest brother to contribute to the formation of a bride price necessary for the marriage of the younger brother who does not benefit by such a compensation. Certainly this principle which was meant to regulate the distribution of the women and to limit competition has not turned out to be infallible. Antagonisms between the "eldest" [brothers] and younger brothers leading to the breaking up of groupings are often explained by this obligation not being met. (1) The oldest men can take advantage of their pre-

1. Cf. supra, pp. 112-113.

eminence in order to buy up the greatest number of wives. Finally,

581 the younger brothers are often tempted to collect for themselves
583 the elements of a bride price or to carry out rapes or raids. They
578 represent the most dynamic and mobile fraction of the grouping. (2)
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> 2. Probably their lineages represent the major part of the Fang population of Lower Gabon. This would help to explain, apart from "modernist" reasons, the more or less pronounced rivalry and antagonisms between the "Fang from above" and the "Fang from below."

However, the earliest observations show that there was a sort of limited polygamy. Fourneau writes: "The Pahouin is in fact most often monogamous, simply because the woman is very highly prices," (3) and Dr. Cureau more specifically states: "Among the

> 3. A. Fourneau, op. cit., p. 77.

Fang where a wife is expensive, the maximum rarely goes above five; apparently thirty years ago, only the very rich could rise to one or two units above humiliating monogamy." (4) These two

> 4. Dr. A. Cureau, op. cit., p. 119.

authors confirm the existence of a restricted polygamy and therefore of a tendency to equalize the distribution of the women which, according to them, is allied with the high cost of bride prices.

583 [125] It is now time to analyze the material nature of the bride price. During the nineteenth century it consisted essentially of iron objects (representations of assagais, Pahouin knives, and axes very reduced in size), of which the bikki are the best known, (1)

> 1. Cf. M. H. Kingsley, op. cit.; the ancient word for bride price is bikki, or nswa bikki.

reserved exclusively for matrimonial exchanges, and of animals,

the law has not changed on this point. "No bride price, no marriage" —Sa nsuba, ve alu' e se kik. We shall find this principle again in connection with legitimate descent.

Thus it is the absence of payment of the nsuba that gives their character to free union, ébon, and to adultery, mejian, and makes them really infringements upon the law of property, justifying the fact that customary courts logically refuse to impose a penalty in a case of ébon when the girl returns to her family pregnant (2).

2. This is hard for some magistrates to understand.

A husband must provide his wife with lodging and clothes and must clothe any children he has by her. He must clear the field she will cultivate, provide her with household utensils and, in theory, with meat. He must allow her to visit her parents, to whom he owes respect. He must not use sorcery (3) against her and must respect the

3. Likened to sorcery are fellatio and sodomy, the grounds for numerous divorces from former members of native infantry regiments.

prerogatives of rank that she holds among her co-wives; he is supposed to sleep with her when she is not menstruating nor pregnant nor nursing. He must not beat her beyond what she can stand nor expose her vulva in public. /54/

A woman owes obedience to her husband, to her mother-in-law, and to the first wife, respect to her affinal relatives, therefore to her husband's clan; she must be faithful to her husband and perform her conjugal duty. She is responsible for cultivating the plots cleared for her, for fishing with weirs, for feeding her children, taking her turn at cooking for her husband, for keeping her hut clean and that of her husband when she is sleeping with him, and for helping to build them (it is she who applies the banco onto the frame). She does not have to take care of imported household equipment and clothes because these are biôm of a masculine nature (but the schools and missions are trying to train women to do so). Finally, and above all, she must be prolific: this is her first duty and a great deal will be forgiven her if she performs it.